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TRAINING AND RESEARCH: UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 49/124 on the United Nations University (UNU), inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to report on innovative measures to improve communication and interaction between the University and other bodies in the United Nations system and to ensure the integration of the work of the University into all relevant activities of the United Nations system.

2. The present report should be considered in conjunction with the report of the Council of the United Nations University on the work of the University in 1995 (A/51/31), which contains a comprehensive section on the interaction between the United Nations and the University (paras. 183-211). The various examples of increasing interaction between the University and the United Nations system provided in the present report are not an exhaustive listing but illustrative examples that indicate the broad trends in closer communication and interaction between the work of the University and the United Nations system.

3. The two most important principles that underlie the development of substantive interactions between the University and the United Nations are contained in the first two articles of the UNU Charter. UNU, including its Council, have stressed enhanced relations with the United Nations as a key policy objective, while preserving the autonomy of the University within the framework of the United Nations.

4. At the intergovernmental level, UNU has helped provide inputs for the decision-making process in different forms, including submitting research results; providing substantive material for reports; and organizing special events to coincide with or provide inputs for policy meetings. At the inter-agency level, UNU has participated in meetings of United Nations senior officials in the economic and social fields, in meetings of a number of subsidiary bodies of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and in consultations for joint activities development, including in the preparation of the UNU Medium-Term Perspective and programme budget. The Secretary-General has taken recent initiatives to ensure a more systematic participation of UNU in ACC machinery, thereby promoting a better integration of work between UNU and the United Nations system.

II. GLOBAL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES

5. In recent years, major United Nations conferences have played an important role in defining policy frameworks for United Nations work in the economic, social, environmental and humanitarian fields. The intergovernmental preparatory phases of those conferences have been provided with inputs from a wide range of sources.

6. UNU has been closely involved in substantive work in support of major United Nations conferences. As part of its programmed activities, the University has undertaken special policy studies and research that were made available to the preparatory processes of United Nations conferences and/or made

available to the conferences themselves. The University has also organized a number of special events related to the themes addressed by each United Nations conference.

7. In preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development and in collaboration with the Government of Japan and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNU hosted a meeting of eminent persons on population and development in Tokyo in January 1994.

8. The UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER) was designated the focal point of UNU for the World Summit for Social Development and it organized a conference on global employment questions, the outcome of which was a two-volume study entitled Global Employment: An International Investigation into the Future of Work that was made available to the Preparatory Committee of the Summit.

9. UNU research activities in the area of women and development, especially the UNU/WIDER project entitled "Global restructuring and women workers in industrializing and transitional economies" and a UNU Institute for New Technologies (UNU/INTECH) project entitled "Monitoring the impact of new technologies and women's industrial work in Asia", were brought to the attention of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The UNU/INTECH project culminated in the publication Women Encounter Technology: Changing Patterns of Employment in the Third World, which was launched at the Conference.

10. The University has been studying the problems of mega-cities since the early 1990s, a long-term effort that is still in progress and will include the publication of a four-volume series on the changing functions of mega-cities - including mega-cities in Africa, Latin America and Asia - in the context of the globalization process. Mega-cities were the focus of a panel discussion at the recently concluded second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Two related books, Mega-City Growth and the Future and Emerging World Cities in Pacific Asia, were launched at Habitat II.

11. Information on UNU work in food and nutrition will be made available to the World Food Summit by means of an expert panel discussion.

12. In the fall of 1994, the University commissioned, jointly with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, a study on mine-clearance technology. The study was widely disseminated to policy makers, academic and research institutions and non-governmental organizations, and was made available to the International Meeting on Mine Clearance (Geneva, 5-7 July 1995).

III. UNITED NATIONS STANDING PROCESSES AND THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

A. General Assembly

13. Since 1994, the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization have briefly described the activities of the University.

14. UNU is actively planning its participation in the 1997 special session of the General Assembly, which will review progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. 1/ UNU is collaborating closely with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the sponsorship of a global modelling forum for sustainable development. Activities being initiated include reviewing the current state of interpreting modelling work for sustainable development; formulating recommendations for improving existing integrated modelling work for sustainable development; developing a linked set of models for integrated global and regional assessments of sustainable development; stimulating the development and use of integrated models in developing countries; and providing support to relevant activities of different bodies. As part of those activities, UNU will be participating in a workshop on integrated modelling of sustainable development. Drawing on the work it initiated in 1991 on global change and modelling and the sustainable future of the global economy, UNU will mobilize its network of eco-restructuring for sustainable development to provide technical inputs in terms of future scenarios and modelling work that will be reported to the Commission on Sustainable Development. UNU will also participate at the Global Educational Associates International Conference on Global Environment Action (to be held in Tokyo from 12 to 24 March 1997) in preparation for the 1997 special session of the General Assembly.

B. The Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary machinery

15. UNU co-sponsored, with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, a high-level panel discussion on the future of development in the course of the substantive session of 1995 of the Economic and Social Council. The special event was held in connection with the Council's fiftieth anniversary and it brought together eminent thinkers and practitioners on development cooperation. Its objective was to take stock of past development cooperation efforts and to provoke a wide-ranging, open and forward-looking discussion of the conceptual, institutional and operational challenges lying ahead in the development field.

16. The summary of a UNU/INTECH study entitled "Environmentally sound technologies and the relevance of enforced environmental legislation: the case of Mexico" was submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development in April 1995.

IV. UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

17. UNU initiated a series of research programmes related to the questions posed by Agenda 21, as well as by the Agenda for Peace and an agenda for development, and African economic recovery and development.

18. UNU launched a major research initiative on the United Nations in the twenty-first century at a symposium held at UNU headquarters on 21 and 22 November 1996. The objective of the five-year research project is to explore and suggest models for international organizations, especially the United Nations, that would best serve human needs in the twenty-first century. The project will lead to the formulation of recommendations and policy suggestions. Specific topics selected for study include States and sovereignty; global citizenship; regionalism and international organizations; and the international civil service.

19. The project is a follow-up to the recently concluded five-year project entitled "Multilateralism and the United Nations system", which sought to elucidate the interaction between the changing structure of world order and the process of international organization. A summary of the outcome of the project will be published in a forthcoming issue of Global Governance, a policy-oriented periodical that was co-sponsored by UNU and the Academic Council of the United Nations system for the purpose of serving as a forum for practitioners and academics to discuss the role and impact of international institutions and multilateral processes in the interrelated fields of international peace and security; economic development and human rights; and the preservation of the environment. Another outgrowth of the project was a publication entitled The United Nations System, a comparative study of the historical development of international organizations, recent proposals for United Nations reform and case studies of national policies towards the United Nations.

20. In the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the University prepared its own contribution to Agenda 21, entitled "Programme on environmentally sustainable development", which was approved by its Governing Council. As part of the programme, the University is continuing its long-term effort in the area of mountain ecology and sustainable development. In that context, the University has been an active participant in the work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, particularly concerning chapter 13 of Agenda 21 (Managing fragile ecosystems: sustainable mountain development).

21. With Canadian support, the University is establishing an international network on water, environment and health that will address critical issues that link water to development and human health, a concern that is of particular relevance to developing countries. As a capacity-building initiative, the network will draw on the expertise of Canadian universities and research centres; its initial priorities will be educational and targeted training programmes.

22. Within the framework of chapter 14 of Agenda 21 (and arts. 8 and 10 of the Convention on Biological Diversity) the UNU project entitled "People, land management and environment change" addresses the question of the

interrelationships between population dynamics and environmental change. In particular, the project examines the processes of adaptation of indigenous resource management systems and land use through a series of field-based research projects in key agro-ecological zones of tropical and subtropical environments. Currently, five research clusters are in operation. The short-term objective of the project is to develop models for conservationist, sustainable and participatory ecosystem and land management in priority ecosystems occupied by small farmers, stressing the value of farmers' skills and knowledge in a context of agro-diversity. Its longer-term objective is to contribute to policy-making, project design and capacity-building in relevant areas, yielding replicable results that can feed into rural development strategies that combine ecological, economical, culturally and socially sustainable small farmer agriculture and land management with the conservation of biodiversity.

23. A workshop on decision support systems for environmentally sustainable development was held in February-March 1996 at the UNU International Institute for Software Technology. Sustainable agriculture and rural development was the subject of a symposium held in Tokyo from 27 to 29 November 1995, as well as of a conference on the sustainable future of the global system held in Tokyo in October 1995. In 1994, the University launched the Zero Emissions Research Initiative, which aims to restructure industrial processes so that they produce no wastes or emissions. To date, two world congresses have been held in Tokyo (1995) and in Chattanooga, United States of America (1996), and some sessions have been held on the Internet.

24. A high-level symposium on peace and development in Africa that addressed the cultural, political and socio-economic causes of conflict in that continent, as well as policy options for strengthening the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, was held in Tokyo on 11 and 12 October 1995. A workshop on changing patterns of employment and the structure of unemployment in the Africa region was held at the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa in Accra on 28 and 29 July 1995.

V. COORDINATION AND INTERACTION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

A. Interaction with the United Nations Secretariat

25. Informal substantive consultations between the Rector and the senior academic staff of the University and United Nations senior officials have been intensified especially in the context of the preparations for the third UNU six-year Medium-Term Perspective and biennial budgets. Such consultations have had a significant impact on the structure and objectives of University programmes. In addition, officials of the United Nations at both the senior and working levels have been increasingly involved in the programmatic planning of the University; this has been especially the case for the programmes developed for the University by two advisory teams set up by the University to suggest the general direction and focus of a long-term programme of research and training in the areas of Agenda 21 and an Agenda for Peace, which were both approved by the Council of the University. Increasing attention is thus being devoted by the

University to matters of immediate concern to the United Nations. In so doing, the University has endeavoured to enhance the policy contents and relevance of its studies, while seeking to maintain academic excellence.

26. Concurrently, a special effort has been made to disseminate the findings of the University's research work more broadly at United Nations Headquarters. Beginning in February 1995, 10 public forums were organized by the University, whose purpose was to disseminate the results of the research undertaken by UNU as part of an effort to stimulate discussion on policy alternatives and to provide the opportunity for the exchange of views between practitioners and scholars. Those events were open to staff of the United Nations Secretariat and other agencies, the permanent missions, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, and each drew 60 to 100 participants; summaries of their discussions were widely circulated.

B. Meetings of United Nations senior officials in the economic and social fields

27. Guided by the objective of improving overall programme coordination and policy coherence within the Organization, the Secretary-General, with the support of his special Coordinator for Economic Social Development, has convened regular meetings of the senior officials in the economic and social sectors. UNU has been represented at those meetings, normally by the Rector; such meetings provide an opportunity to discuss a wide range of policy issues and major developments within the Organization as a whole, including its programmes and funds as well as the regional commissions, and serve as a useful means for planning coordinated efforts in development cooperation areas. Some of the subjects discussed at recent meetings include preparations for follow-up to global conferences; restructuring in the economic and social sectors; resource flows for development; cooperation and division of labour with the Bretton Woods institutions; African economic recovery and development; United Nations-non-governmental organizations relations; gender equality issues; an agenda for development; the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations; public administration and governance; and the financial situation of the United Nations.

28. The establishment of the Senior Officials Information Network, to which the Rector of UNU is linked, has provided a basis for regular information-sharing. UNU's regular presence at a high level at senior officials meetings has helped promote improved understanding and a better integration of work in relation to a wide range of activities of organization-wide concern.

C. Interaction with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

29. Cooperation between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNU was also significantly reinforced in the 1990s. During the third Medium-Term Plan of UNESCO, the major objective was to promote an interdisciplinary approach to programme conception and implementation. A number of initiatives, such as the Management of Social Transformations, the

Culture of Peace, the Interdisciplinary Programme in Environmental Population and Preventive Education, and the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, were launched, while others, including the established Man and the Biosphere programme, consolidated their interdisciplinary focus still further. The links between such initiatives and those included in the UNU second Medium-Term Perspective were numerous.

30. Special mention should be made in the context of UNESCO/UNU cooperation in relation to the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, which aims to optimize the contribution of high-level academic research and training to the solution of development problems. Excellent support has been provided to the Programme by UNU, drawing on its special expertise in interdisciplinary research and training. The protocol signed in February 1994 for that collaboration has ensured that all projects launched under the auspices of UNITWIN have immediately benefited from access to UNU experience in related fields of study.

31. Several joint UNU and UNESCO activities have been undertaken in recent years, in the areas of education, science, social studies, culture and communication. The Director-General's comments on the work of the University and on cooperation between UNESCO and the University during 1994-1995, which were presented to the Executive Board at its one hundred and forty-ninth session, contain a detailed listing of areas of cooperation.

D. Participation of the United Nations University in the machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination

32. The Secretary-General attaches great importance to ensuring that UNU is effectively integrated in the work of the United Nations system. A more systematic participation by UNU in ACC machinery would contribute significantly to that objective.

33. With those objectives in mind, the Secretary-General has recommended that UNU be invited to be represented in all consultative committees that constitute the subsidiary machinery of ACC. In particular, the systematic participation of UNU in the ACC Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development would serve to promote closer interaction on both policy and programme questions.

34. As to ACC itself, arrangements for UNU participation will need to take into account the particular status of the University. UNU will be kept systematically informed of the ACC work programme, which will enable the University to indicate whether the agenda of any given session includes an item to which the University, in view of its work programme, would have an especially important contribution to make. The Secretary-General will then recommend to ACC the participation of the Rector in the relevant ACC discussion.

35. In addition, it is intended that periodic consultations between the Rector of the University and ACC members will be arranged, at a suitable time in the UNU planning cycle, to identify research topics for inclusion in the UNU programme that could serve to maximize the UNU contribution to the work of the

system. At its second regular session of 1996 (scheduled for late October), ACC is expected to endorse those arrangements.

VI. OTHER ISSUES

36. Since 1995, UNU has participated in the United Nations Sabbatical Leave Programme, which provides opportunities for United Nations staff members to build close contacts between the global academic community and international civil servants in the United Nations system and to expose them to state-of-the-art research.

37. The objective of the recently launched United Nations Staff College project is to promote and strengthen, through a series of training actions, better cross-programme linkages, intersectoral cooperation and coordination in the major areas of activities of the United Nations, and at the same time to promote and strengthen management capacities and a more cohesive system-wide management culture. Efforts are currently being made to identify and adapt existing relevant training programmes and develop new ones in line with the main objectives of the Staff College project. In line with the mandates of its Charter, UNU can provide support to the United Nations Staff College project in curriculum development.

VII. CONCLUSION

38. The involvement of UNU at various levels of United Nations activity - intergovernmental and inter-agency - is close and is becoming more clearly defined and institutionalized. Further efforts will be made through ACC and its subsidiary machinery, as well as through the meetings of senior officials in the economic and social fields, to strengthen the structures and modalities for communication, interaction and integration that already exist. It is expected that mechanisms in place and existing cooperation will be further enhanced and strengthened in the future.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.